

Personal Positioning and PR Strategy

By [Joelle Jay](#)

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Today it's time for a self-assessment.

- Do you believe others perceive you as the leader you want to be?
- Do they see you leading at the level you want to lead?
- For that matter, do they *see you*...at all?

When you are focused on advancing yourself as a leader, including when you're interested in elevating yourself to a board position, it's not just *who you are* that matters. It's *how others see you*. We want to be sure those two things are aligned.

It's time to become visible as a leader.

Personal Positioning

This part of the journey is to help you get more visible as a potential board member. What is it you want to do? Who are you trying to reach?

In the prior steps on this journey, you got clarity on the messaging – your pitch and your stories – that will help represent you. In this step, we take those messages on the road.

Mara Brazer is a communications coach and media strategist with the Athena Alliance who has been advising CEOs, executives and business leaders for 30 years. As a corporate and advisory board member herself, she has the inside view as to how women need to position themselves to gain their objectives.

At this stage, it's worth revisiting that question for yourself.

- What are your objectives right now in your professional life?
- Are trying to get on a corporate board, advance in your career, or both?

Whatever your professional objectives at this moment, you will want to position yourself to achieve them and put together the strategy for being seen.

Choosing the Path

If preparing yourself to be ready for a board seat is a journey, today you are choosing the path you will take to get there.

Unlike prior steps on the journey where you were collecting ideas and packing your toolkit with pitches and stories to introduce yourself, today you'll be thinking about how to hit the road and finding the people with whom you want to share your message.

To find your path, Mara suggests some more questions to guide the way.

- Who will help you meet your objectives? In other words, who is your target audience?
- What messages do they want to hear? This is a different angle than what messages you want to deliver – it's knowing how to answer your target audience's unspoken question, "What's it in for me?"
- What do you want from them? This is where you clarify your ask, so you can put it out there. Do you want a board seat? An executive position? Some other opportunity?

Envisioning First Steps

This part of the journey becomes quite personal, as the way you approach personal positioning depends on what you're trying to achieve.

Imagine that you are indeed looking for a board seat now. You've identified that as a future step in your career, and you're doing everything you can to be ready for the opportunity. That's your objective.

So, you think about who might be able to help you get on a board. CEOs, investors, colleagues, former colleagues already on corporate boards – these are now your target audiences. They are the ones who need to hear your messages and understand why they should care about having you on their team. They should understand what you can bring to their company, and how your expertise aligns to their own vision and objectives.

Then, you would think about what you want. If a board position is what you want, this means clarifying how you want to serve, who you want to serve, and the impact you want to make.

- A CFO I once coached decided after a career in finance, what she really wanted to do was promote a healthier world; she joined boards related to sustainable living.

- A Silicon Valley executive with highly technical expertise decided to pursue a board seat in an industry she loved but knew little about: fashion.
- Other women have chosen boards that gave them opportunities to travel to Paris, Tokyo and Sydney; or they chose board positions specifically in their home city so they could stop traveling for work and enjoy making an impact closer to home.

The reasons you love what you love and want to do what you want to do are all about you and your personal choices. They come up here, because once you know what you want, now you can position yourself to get it.

Stops Along the Path

Once you have thought through your personal positioning, now it's time to take your ideas and share them. If pursuing a board seat is a campaign, and you are a candidate, these are the stops on your tour.

Where will you share your messages?

Think about social media. What's your platform? LinkedIn? Twitter? YouTube? Where will you share your messages? For most board candidates, LinkedIn is usually the most relevant choice; how can you leverage LinkedIn to advance your goals?

Consider speaking engagements. Where might you appear as a guest speaker, panelist, or expert?

TED Talks? Meetings and Conferences? Ideas Festivals?

Identify your media strategy. Can you establish yourself as an expert source with reporters who reach your target audiences? Can you submit articles with your byline espousing your special viewpoints, to business publications?

On Your Way

So much of your journey to a board seat involves the internal processes you need to be ready. Designing your strategy; building an executive brand package, strengthening your voice and presence, and collecting ideas for your thought leadership have been the focus so far. But now, it's time to share all of that with the people who need to know you.

Here's how it may sound when you do.

"I really appreciated the help [I received from Athena]. The turnaround was quick, and I had several "ah-has" from our conversation about how to position myself better. And, I loved [my coach's] approach to getting to my value. Plus, her personal way of "being" is just all-around enjoyable. This help alone is worth my membership in Athena." —

Michelle Lewis, Principal @ CapStreet Group

Position yourself in the right way, make choices about what's in your PR strategy, and you'll be moving down the path that leads you to the opportunity you want.